

Hidden domestic violence: report of seminar at Blackburne House, Liverpool, 16 October 2008



This report summarises issues arising from the seminar, highlights key points made by speakers and delegates, recommendations from the workshops and responses to these from agencies represented on the final panel.

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SUMMARY

“Capacity, capability and resources are central to addressing these issues effectively”

Huge demand for information: Interest in this seminar from statutory and voluntary agencies in the region was overwhelming. The relevance of the agenda and the diversity of issues covered obviously struck a chord across the health, social care, criminal justice and voluntary sectors. The seminar was fully booked within a few weeks, despite the fact that the invitation went out in August and we had to turn many people away who wanted to come. Many of the 150 delegates would have liked more time for debate and the opportunity to attend more than one workshop: *“Domestic abuse is such a massive agenda – I would have liked a full day.”*

Need for wider awareness of warning signs: One of the key issues emerging from the seminar was the need to improve awareness of signs and symptoms of domestic abuse, which can manifest itself in different ways. The warning signs could be spotted anywhere – in the workplace, at school or college, in a surgery or hospital, by any other public service or by a voluntary organisation, which implies a need for wide-ranging education and awareness programmes. People need to ask the right questions if a young person goes missing, or a woman seeks treatment for depression, for example.

Benefits of an integrated response: Speakers and delegates stressed the benefits of an integrated response, with protocols on information sharing and genuine partnership working across all agencies so that victims are less likely to “slip through the net”. This co-ordination needs to be established at a regional level as well locally in order to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse and to protect and support victims.

Importance of accurate data: Consistency and accuracy in the recording of data about victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse was a recurring theme. Evidence about incidence in different communities is needed to strengthen the argument for specialist support and enable monitoring of progress, within the region and in comparison to other parts of the country.

Positive feedback: The majority of the 150 delegates rated the seminar good or very good, notwithstanding a problem with the AV equipment and parking issues for some on the day. Comments on the evaluation forms showed that the programme was appreciated: *“Really interesting and useful afternoon”* *“Very, very helpful.”* *“Excellent speakers – interesting and knowledgeable.”* *“Challenging and informative.”* *“I enjoyed the sessions and am empowered to make a difference.”* *“Needs to be repeated”*

PLENARY SPEAKERS

Ruth Hussey, Regional Director of Public Health

In opening the event, Ruth explained that 4NW organised the seminar in partnership with NHS and GONW in support of Regional Equality and Diversity Strategy, which has reducing hate crime and domestic violence as one of its top 3 priorities. The other key driver for the seminar is that more than half of the Local Area Agreements in the NW include a target to reduce repeat incidence of domestic violence.

Andrea Murray, Director of Strategy, Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

- **Gendered approach:** EHRC takes a gendered perspective on domestic violence, adopting the same approach as the Crown Prosecution Service. As the vast majority of domestic violence victims are women, a gender-neutral approach is not sensible.
- **Integrated strategy;** EHRC supports the End Violence Against Women campaign which is calling on the Government to develop an integrated strategy to tackle violence against women.
- **Duty to promote good relations:** Tackling domestic violence also falls within EHRC’s duty to promote good relations.
- **Education and prevention:** Andrea expressed concern that the Government’s focus on the criminal justice system has been at the expense of education and prevention programmes to change attitudes towards violence against women
- **Enforcement:** EHRC expects public authorities to take violence against women into account under the gender equality duty and has the option of legal enforcement if they think adequate action is not being taken.
- **Provision for specific communities:** EHRC intervened in the successful judicial review of the decision by Ealing Council to withdraw funding from Southall Black Sisters. They are now working with the Local Government Association to publish guidance on the implications of this decision for the funding of services to specific communities

- **UN report:** EHRC is registering with the United Nations as a national human rights body. They cited Britain's lack of an integrated national strategy as part of a report to the UN on Britain's progress in meeting the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Saima Afzal, Equality and Diversity lead, Association of Police Authorities and independent member, Lancashire Police Authority

- **National role:** In November 2007, the Association of Police Authorities appointed Saima as the first person at board level to take the lead on equality and diversity issues
- **Equality impact assessment:** Equality Impact Assessments should be used as a tool. People get frightened of them because of the paperwork, but it doesn't have to be more complicated than asking people what their needs are.
- **Diversity within police authorities:** 10% of police authority members are from an ethnic minority and 20% of the independent members, compared to their representation on local authorities which is only 5%.
- **2010 inspections:** Police Authority inspections will have more teeth and be more proactive. They will be asking communities themselves what they think of the services provided.
- **Forced Marriage Act:** New legislation comes into force on 28 November 2008
- **Involving communities:** The police need to go beyond engaging communities to actually involving them, to build up trust and confidence.
- **Working in partnership:** If the police are more proactive in dealing with forced marriage and honour based violence, it is critical that other agencies are on board to prevent escalation of violence
- **Talk to women and young people:** If young people think that your agency talks only to the elders in the community, they won't trust you to represent their views and be on their side
- **Don't label communities:** Data on forced marriage is unreliable, but it doesn't only affect Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Within traveller communities, for example, forced marriage is a big issue for young people. Negative aspects of culture in other communities, such as drink driving, are not used to stigmatise the whole community
- **Identify your equality and diversity lead:** Saima's advice was to identify and work with the equality and diversity lead on your local police authority to take these issues forward or she can be contacted directly at saima.afzal@lpa.lancscc.gov.uk

Ian Hopkins, Assistant Chief Constable, Greater Manchester Police

- **Scrutiny:** Ian started by welcoming Police Authority involvement and scrutiny in this area
- **Police don't always get it right:** In the last 2 months, three women have lost their lives in Greater Manchester as a result of domestic violence, which means children have lost their mother.

- **Sometimes do get it right:** A 19 year old woman was being held in Bangladesh against her will and went to the British embassy, who helped her back to Britain. Police met her at the airport and liaised with social services. The father was arrested and charged for assault.
- **Challenge to get all staff to recognise their responsibilities:** Sometimes incidents are written off as a false call without a thorough investigation – need more training for all staff
- **Rise in reported incidents:** Reports of domestic incidents are going up in Greater Manchester, which shows increased confidence of people to report incidents to the police. 45% are repeat victims. 200 cases a month seen at MARACs in Greater Manchester
- **LGBT community:** Greater Manchester Police ran a poster campaign in telephone kiosks in the gay village in Manchester and took out adverts in the Out magazine during the month of the Gay Pride festival. They work with the LGBT internal staff support group and provide LGBT liaison course for police officers
- **Protocols:** They have developed protocols with the Family Justice Centre in Manchester and Crown Prosecution Service to ensure rapid, effective support to victims from the moment they first call for help.
- **Domestic violence courts:** Wigan's Domestic Violence Court has one of the best results in the country for successful prosecutions
- **Manchester airport:** They have recently begun targeting the airport for potential victims of forced marriage, providing information to people as they enter or leave the country
- **Issues for improvement:** Recording data effectively is a big area for improvement and the police need to improve their attendance at case conferences. Ian has recently secured funding to improve capability on public protection.
- **Violence accepted as the norm:** After a recent murder of a woman in Bolton, neighbours told police afterwards that they knew what was going on, but no one had reported it to the police, GP or clergy. The challenge is to change the culture so that people do report domestic violence and agencies intervene before it is too late. *"This is a huge challenge for us"*.

Christine Gough, Government Office North West

- **Multitude of partners:** Many different agencies involved in tackling domestic violence
- **Tiers of risk:** Need effective intervention at different levels
- **North West network:** The network of domestic violence co-ordinators which Christine chairs is taking a thematic approach and will be looking at the issue of race at a future meeting

Caroline Rowsell, Sefton Council

- **Get support of decision-makers:** Caroline's post is mainstream funded. She had to get the strategists on board, demonstrating that they would achieve their targets and save money by funding posts in her team.

- **Violence against women strategy:** Sefton has made a conscious decision to adopt a violence against women strategy, not a domestic violence strategy, *“If you get it right for women, you’ll get it right for men too.”*
- **Agree a vision:** A vision helps you to work at different levels. Their’s is a big statement and they have a long way to go
- **Hope:** *“You have to keep hoping and have to work together to realise that hope”*
- **40 cases per month:** Sefton’s Multi Agency Assessment Conference (MARAC), sees 40 cases per month
- **Co-located with police:** This has made a big difference. A police officer goes out to investigate, then the case comes straight to her team. Every police officer has to complete paperwork and give it to a domestic violence advocate.
- **Repeat victimisation gone up:** After an initial decrease in the number of repeat incidents, this has now gone up. Caroline believes this is due to more reporting, so could be seen as positive. She would expect it to decline over time.
- **Challenge of partnership working:** Power and control make the relationships hard work, ironically just as in an abusive relationship. There is a lot of mistrust, dishonesty and disrespect.
- **Keep working at it or women and children will continue to die**

ISSUES RAISED BY DELEGATES

Role of the NHS: Although heartened that Ruth Hussey was chairing the seminar, some questioned whether PCTs are contributing enough to respond to this agenda or whether health managers take the issue seriously. The NHS has a significant role as a point of contact with victims and can influence the direction of service provision. Domestic violence is also highly relevant to mental health services. There was a call for Department of Health recommendations for supporting domestic violence victims within the NHS – covering access to services, appropriate care, data collection, training and resources. *“Domestic abuse needs to be on every public health agenda”*

Violence against women: Although some delegates supported domestic violence being located within a Violence Against Women strategy, others questioned this. *How can diversity be addressed under a strategy which excludes victims who are heterosexual and gay men?*

Reasons why people do not call the police: If people report an incident but do not see the police follow it up, they lose confidence and don’t bother in the future. Ian Hopkins acknowledged that people answering calls work to a script, which can be too rigid for domestic violence cases. A lot of incidents don’t reach the threshold for a police response.

Education and prevention work does not attract sufficient funding: Some delegates felt frustrated by the lack of funding for education and wider prevention initiatives, because funding is overly geared at meeting MARAC targets which focus on the “high level” cases.

Avoid jargon and acronyms which create a barrier for people who are not working full-time in the field, yet have an important contribution to make.

Domestic abuse is a more appropriate term than domestic violence, because other forms of abuse can be more harmful than violence

Sons and mothers: One person raised the issue of young men under 18 who are perpetrators of domestic violence against their mothers. The Government's definition of domestic violence doesn't appear to cover this.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WORKSHOPS

Older women

Key points

- People may find it hard to believe that an elderly disabled man being cared for by his wife is hitting and verbally abusing her, or that she has put up with abuse for 60 years, but we all need to believe it and to be aware of the possibility
- Self contained accommodation within refuges can be more appropriate for older women who would not be comfortable living communally.

Recommendations

1. Ensure that people who come into contact with older women, eg organisations like Arthritis Care, have the skills and competencies to ask the right questions, recognise the symptoms of domestic abuse, respond appropriately and know the right referral pathways
2. Forge links between child, adult and domestic abuse. Get to know our Adult Safeguarding Co-ordinators.
3. Make sure that people have enough information about options to make an informed decision about their future.
4. Publicity about domestic abuse and support services for victims needs to be put up in places where older people will see it.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

Key points

- It is a myth that in LGBT relationships there are no children involved – this is often not the case.
- Lesbians can experience homophobic abuse from other women when they access refuges.
- 50% of LGBT's will report incidences to friends, 16% to LGBT organisations, 10% to police – yet 80% of lesbians do not report.
- There is increased risk in first relationship or where there is a 10 year or more age gap between partners.
- MYTHS – it doesn't happen, the abuse is mutual, the law doesn't protect, it's easy to leave an LGBT relationship.
- Very few specific LGBT services. Currently one in Brighton and a few in London. Broken Rainbow only has 4 staff to cover whole country. Their website recommended as source of information.

- Domestic abuse services across the board are fighting for funding, let alone specific LGBT services
- Not all gay switchboards or other LGBT organisations have the knowledge or expertise to respond appropriately to victims of domestic violence
- There are only 68 LGBT registered charities in the UK, 5 of which are in the North West. So a very small sector in terms of organised groups
- Big problem is the collection of data and the sharing of intelligence and evidence because LGBTs are not reporting or do not feel empowered to do so. Some councils refuse to monitor as believe there are no lesbians or gay men in their local area. Yet data is needed to build strong business plans in applications for funding.
- Domestic violence services should be more welcoming to all, which means tackling institutionalised homophobia through improved capacity for training/ awareness around sexual orientation and specific needs.
- Broken Rainbow has calls from gay men and lesbians who are victims of forced marriage and/or abused by relatives because of their sexuality. Immigration status can also be an issue – in other words, people affected by domestic abuse can fall into more than one category – they may be ethnic minority as well as gay, for example

Recommendations

1. A specialised regional service for lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender victims of domestic violence, with access points in major cities of the North West.
2. Two points of referral after reporting of an incident – police and health professional.
3. GPs could become more involved in data capture and exchange as this is currently very poor.

Disabled women

Key issues

- Disabled women are affected by their disability as well as their gender – so agencies need to understand the links between “equality strands”
- The Criminal Justice Service uses a medical model of disability, so for example a person with learning disabilities who has been subject to domestic abuse can be given an IQ test to decide whether or not she will be a credible witness.

Recommendations

1. There is a need to raise awareness and understanding about the issues for disabled women experiencing domestic abuse. It was noted that none of the plenary speakers mentioned disability.
2. Domestic violence agencies need to ensure their services are accessible to disabled women.
3. Disability organisations need to be aware of the issues for disabled women experiencing domestic violence. Both areas of work need to make the links.
4. More training required.

Ethnic minorities

Key points in relation to access

- Women without secure immigration status have no recourse to public funds
- Some victims do not meet criteria to access health services
- Need for advocates with expertise in cultural issues to support women to access services
- Use PHSE lessons to raise awareness in schools
- Promote anonymous access to external agencies – eg Childline, counselling service
- Fear and mistrust of mainstream agencies
- Is she ever seen alone? Will she trust an interpreter?
- Confidentiality is critically important

Key points in relation to practice

- Staff training/awareness – often no one picks up on the symptoms of “honour” violence. Social workers, A&E, midwife, mental health services, gynaecology
- Improve signposting
- Agencies to work in partnership when dealing with patients - Common Assessment Framework
- Holistic approach
- Clear statement re violence prevention and policy distributed to all staff, with clear allocation of responsibilities
- Protocols re information sharing – eg medical history
- Time pressures and targets can get in the way

Key points in relation to policy

- Human Rights Act protects parents as well as young people
- Mental Health Act can be relevant
- Cultural sensitivity v child protection – where to draw the line
- User involvement to test policies
- Review statistics and lessons learned

“Multicultural sensitivity is not an excuse for moral blindness”

Recommendations

1. Advocacy/ campaigning for women seeking asylum and failed by the state
2. All agencies should review policies to make sure they are robust enough to support ethnic minority women.
3. Joined up policy and shared protocols would improve support to victims.

Male victims

Key issues

- Reluctance of male victims to come forward.
- Men who present with injuries at Accident and Emergency may be victims of domestic violence
- A high proportion of victims are also perpetrators – as much as 60-70%

“Mark’s presentation was an eye-opener in many ways”

Recommendations

1. Need two different pathways to deal with men – as victims and as perpetrators.
2. Only 30 perpetrator programmes in the country, so need to develop more in the North West.
3. Genuine cases of male victims cannot be overlooked, but agencies must always be aware of the partner in the background, who may also be at risk.
4. More research is needed so that practitioners and policy makers have a better understanding about male victims of domestic abuse and are able to respond appropriately.

PANEL RESPONSE

Gail Porter, Home office representative, GONW: It’s about individuals. Need more information sharing and investment of time. Have to translate talking into practical action on the ground. Useful to hear about the barriers to people accessing services

Steve Barwick, 4NW: The reason 4NW organised this event was to bring all the agencies together to discuss this all-too real issue which adversely affects the quality of life in the region. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem, but he has been inspired by the excellent work and dedication of people working to deal with these issues that have been evident from the discussions. Domestic violence is prioritised in the Regional Equality and Diversity Strategy. Given the current economic climate, unfortunately it may be case of smarter use of resources, not necessarily new resources.

Heather Barclay, Equality and Human Rights Commission: Violence against Women costs £40billion, of which domestic violence costs £23 billion per year – so we are already spending the money on it. Wouldn’t it be better to invest that money in prevention. The seminar has brought home the scope and the scale of domestic violence, which is the biggest single group of crimes in the UK. *“It’s time to do something about it.”*

Saima Afzal, Association of Police Authorities: There is absolutely no excuse to use culture for not taking action to deal with domestic abuse. There is a risk aversion to dealing with equality in some public agencies. We need a culture shift. *“Look at the crime, not the community.”* On a separate point, Saima questioned whether it was right to put transgender within the LGB community as it is different issue – gender identity not sexual orientation.

Ian Hopkins, Greater Manchester Police: There is a need for consistency of approach in all agencies – so that we can all spot the signs and symptoms and take appropriate action

Sam Darby, Home Office: Sam is responsible for the National Domestic Violence Delivery Plan. They are looking at prevention and will introduce a prevention objective. On No recourse to public funds, she explained that they are still working on details of the new scheme announced in March, which should be made public by the end of December.

Christine Gough, Government Office North West: Funding – the Government Office can only give pump prime funding for domestic violence. She re-iterated the importance of working at strategic level to secure mainstream funding. Funding will be the theme of a future meeting of the North West Domestic Violence Co-ordinators network

Caroline Rowsell, Sefton Council: *“I want us to stop talking about domestic violence and start talking about violence against women”*. Adopt a local strategy – don’t wait for a national strategy from the Government. We have a local responsibility. We work in complex agencies which have an inability to work outside our own silos. We should be talking about that complexity, not about complex victims. *“The problem is the service, not the victim”*

CLOSING REMARKS

Ruth said that she would be taking away a very clear message on prevention, not least because of the consequences of violence. She felt there is a real opportunity to make a paradigm shift, led by the Department of Health:

“I will give my pledge that we will talk about this in senior leadership across the region. It doesn’t get enough air time”.

Ruth Hussey, Regional Director of Public Health

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4NW is the Regional Leaders Forum for England's Northwest

APPENDIX: Topics for future seminars

On the evaluation forms, delegates were invited to suggest issues that they would like an opportunity to discuss at a future event. Suggestions included:

- **Impact on children:** Exploring the support and prevention offered by Child Assessment Frameworks
- **Female Genital Mutilation** which affects thousands of British subjects each year
- Summary of **strategic levers** that can be used to promote partnership and secure local funding
- More **case studies and examples of good practice** about how different organisations support individuals: would like a list of support services in the North West and updates on new initiatives. *“Can GONW or the Home office share good practice with the DV leads in the North West?”*
- Role and responsibility of the **Crown Prosecution Service**
- **Drug and alcohol issues** for domestic abuse victims
- Input from advocates, grass roots organisations and the **voice of victims** themselves
- **Addressing scars** of past domestic violence
- **Domestic abuse within the workplace** -How can employers support a violence against women approach?
- A seminar on each of the issues covered by the workshops, to explore in more depth the issues faced by **ethnic minorities, older women, disabled women, LGBT people and male victims.**

Report by Helen Wollaston, Equal to the Occasion, October 2008